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Election Address: There Is A Socialist Alternative

The forthcoming May General Election will see a myriad of political parties asking the working class majority to vote for them and their policies. Each political party will take capitalism for granted, the class system as given and the private ownership of the means of production and distribution as natural, unquestionable and inviolable. Workers will be expected to vote for leaders who will claim they have a vision for a “*better future*” and the necessary skill to change and shape of society for the benefit of everyone.

The propaganda of the capitalist political parties is that there is a fundamental difference between them and the other political parties who will be contesting the General Election. Labour will promise to “*save the NHS from Tory privatisation*” and to ease austerity measures. The Tories will say a vote for them is a vote for economic probity and lower taxation. The Liberal Democrats will try to tell workers that they “*humanised*” the Tories when in power and did a lot for the poor. The Greens will say they, and only they, can “*save the planet*” while UKIP will blame all societies’ problems on the European Union and the unrestrained movement of migrant labour into Britain.

For the working class, that is, those who live on wages and salaries, to be taken in by this propaganda, is a big mistake. There is no fundamental difference between the capitalist political parties. They all work within the framework of commodity production and exchange for profit and their policies have to reflect the social reality of world competition and the economic laws that act on capitalism.

The function, of politicians, if elected, is to administer capitalism and to serve the interest of the capitalist class. This is what the manifestoes of the capitalist political parties really offer the working class at the May election. And it is in the interest of the working class to see the baseless “*offer*” for what it is and resist the temptation of wasting their vote by mistakenly voting capitalist politicians into power.

The Parties of Capitalism

Both the Conservative and the Labour Party like to present themselves as the parties of business; the parties of free trade and the free market; of competition and “*liberal*” labour markets. And for those who still do not understand the Labour Party’s commitment to capitalism and the capitalist class here is a selection of their lecture titles aimed at “*business leaders*”; celebrating “*British Business*”. The first was a lecture given by Chukka Umunna, the shadow secretary of state for business in July of this year; the second, “*Labour’s Plan for capitalism that works for all* (sic) written by the author of the Labour Party’s Manifesto, Jon Cruddas in the EVENING STANDARD (5 June 2014) and third “*Celebrating the contribution of the UK’s small business*” given as a lecture by Chukka Umunna in February last year. All the lectures and newspaper articles above could have been given by a Tory politician. And so could the speeches of Ed Miliband who at a business seminar hosted by Google in May 2013 stated that he was for a

“responsible capitalism”:

...and this is an agenda being led by business, where companies pursue profit but we also have an equal society, power is in the hands of the many and where we recognise our responsibilities to each other.

Such a sentiment is pure nonsense. You cannot reconcile a competitive and exploitive capitalism with social equality and responsibility. You cannot have both a competitive and a co-operative social system; reality is just not like that. So, if Miliband becomes Prime Minister and forms a Labour Government he will be run by the dictates of capitalism and the interest of the capitalist class, just like the Tories and just like previous Labour governments. All capitalist politics which believes capitalism can be reformed in the interest of all society ends in failure.

Although they scream and shout at each other from across the floor of the House of Commons each Wednesday at Prime Minister's Question Time; Cameron and Miliband both accept the profit motive and the specious claim that there is no alternative to capitalism. Although neither can define capitalism they believe, despite periodic economic crises, bankruptcies and mass unemployment, the market is the most efficient method in producing and distributing goods and services. Theirs is a politics that denies an alternative to capitalism, the wages system and class exploitation. It is a politics of deceit.

The dogmatic assertion that there is no alternative to capitalism is a myth. When someone tells you that there is no alternative you know deep down there is an alternative. After all the daily misery of having to use what passes for public transport, to eat food not knowing where it comes from, to buy goods that fall apart because they have been shoddily made only adds to other social problems like the pollution caused by capitalist production, the despoliation of the environment, the unpleasantness of employment and the overriding imperative of profit making with respect to poverty, ill health and starvation. Our daily experience of capitalism tells us that it is an inefficient way in meeting our needs; that markets fail and it is not the best of all possible worlds.

For capitalism is hardly *“efficient”*. There is the constant waste; some 1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted each year while there is deliberate underproduction because capitalism is only interested in customers who can pay for goods not in meeting their needs. And then there are the wars across the planet diverting social wealth in the production of guns, warships and bombs. And the anti-social drive of capitalism, what Marx referred to as the *“expansion of value”* is nothing more than the capital accumulation for the sake of capital accumulation with profit making is the only objective. Meeting human need is not what capitalism is about.

Then there is the world divided into warring competitive nation states, of lean cats fighting fat cats of state and private terrorism, of the mass ignorance of religion and the wrapping of closed minds in nationalist flags to kill and be killed in capitalism's wars. And at a more entrenched level there is the division of the world into a minority class owning the means of production and distribution to the exclusion of the working class majority forced onto the labour market to be exploited by producing more social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries; a class struggle manifesting itself in strikes, attacks by employers on wages and working conditions and the capitalist class and media splitting the working class against itself through a politics of *“divide and rule”*. This is the conflict ridden world the Labour Party and Tories are comfortable with; the one they defend and the one they tell workers there is no alternative to.

Alongside the main two parties are the Liberal Democrats and the capitalist left. They claim capitalism can be changed by social reform; by nationalisation policies; by replacing one set of leaders by another. These political charlatans promise workers reforms like the right to work, workers on boards of directors, profit-sharing schemes and nationalisation programmes, but never the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by socialism. These political parties are no better than the two major parties. They can only offer capitalism and their policies can never meet the needs of all society.

And then there is UKIP; the party that plays on fear, on ignorance and on xenophobia; a politics with a vision of a lost mythical past, of deference, law and order, and of Victorian values. UKIP are bank rolled by the rich; they are for capitalism and they are for free markets as long as it is not the free movement into Britain of Romani Gypsies, Bulgarians, Romanians and the wrong sort of Pole. Their *“libertarianism”* masks a nasty streak of *“authoritarianism”*. Beware demagogues with pints of beer in their hand disgorging their DAILY MAIL politics

from the Saloon Bar of Middle England. Demagogues, have historically, led to barbed wire fences, little pellets of hate and human ash blowing in the wind.

The Socialist Alternative

Socialists, unlike the capitalist parties standing at the next general election, say that there is an alternative to capitalism; a revolutionary alternative; the socialist framework provided by the common ownership, without the need for money or wages, and democratic control of the means of production by all of society. Unlike the failed state capitalism of the Soviet Union and the failed nationalisation policies of the Labour Party, socialism will be a classless society of free men and women where production and distribution takes place just to meet human need. This socialist alternative is the only alternative worth voting for.

Socialist production would not only meet human need but will be produced for quality and durability. Production and distribution will take place by cooperative and social labour in harmony with the environment rather than against it. And socialism will be worldwide with no artificial boundaries. Socialism will be a society of abundance rather than the deliberate scarcity in which human beings would co-operate democratically for the common good.

Socialism is a real and practical choice to capitalism. However the act of establishing socialism must be conscious and it must be political. This requires workers first becoming socialists, forming themselves into a principled socialist party with socialism and only socialism as its aim. And that party is the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

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Oil, War and Capitalism

For someone to state that the recent war in Iraq was essentially about oil is to have them labelled by their opponent as a “*conspiracy theorist*”. Conspiracies do occur in politics but conspiracy theorists constantly dismiss counter arguments which they will just explain away. Nothing offered to the conspiracy theorist in the way of evidence will dissuade them from holding their irrational position about the world.

This is not the case with the relationship between oil and war. Empirical studies exist to show that governments go to war over strategic interests, trade routes and raw materials like oil. War is a necessary outcome of the conflict between and within nation states where a specific capitalist country has to survive in a highly competitive and aggressive world market.

Those who reject the shallow and facile claim of former Prime Minister, Tony Blair and the former Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw that the motivation for war in Iraq was moral considerations not ones of securing oil and oil supply now have solid research to back-up their position. Conspiracy theorists we are not. Academics from the universities of Portsmouth, Warwick and Essex, have recently shown that foreign intervention in a civil war is 100 times more likely when the afflicted country has high oil reserves than if it had none.

In a paper *Oil above Water, Economic Interdependence and Third Party Intervention (Journal of Conflict Resolution*, January 27th 2015) the authors, V. Bove, K. Gleditsch and P. Sekeris confirm the role of oil as a dominant motivating force in conflict within and between nation states. The researchers modelled the decision-making process of third-party countries in interfering in civil wars and examined their economic motives. They show that hydrocarbons were a major reason for the military intervention in Libya by a coalition which included the UK, and the current US campaign against ISIS in Northern Iraq.

The study analysed 69 civil wars between 1945 and 1999 noting that civil wars have made up more than 90 per cent of all armed conflict since World War Two and that two-thirds of these conflicts have seen a third party intervention.

The academics believe that Western capitalist intervention in the Middle East will scale-back over the next decade as

the price of oil falls and shale production in the US gathers apace. However, given that no economist predicated the rapid fall in the price of oil and the continuing strategic importance to Western capitalism of the Middle East to block the influence of Russia and China in the region, the belief of reduced conflict held by the academics is just that; a belief.

Although the struggle for raw resources is a cause of war under capitalism by far the most important cause of war is strategic spheres of influence and the protection of trade routes. The Middle East is a vitally strategic communications hub providing a land bridge between three continents while global air routes constantly pass over the region.

The US, for example, has a number of bases in Saudi Arabia whose regime is just as barbaric and ruthless as ISIS. In an Orwellian twist, atheism is deemed to be a terrorist act not the Wahhabi religious ideology the Saudi government exports around the world; political dissent leads to a public flogging, women are unable to drive and one cleric recently tried to stop the construction of snowmen on the grounds that they were “*unislamic*”. Let us also not forget that the Saudi’s print and distribute anti-scientific pamphlets attacking Darwin’s theory of evolution as well as the anti-Semitic tract, The Elders of Zion.

Given the crisis in the Ukraine there are military and naval bases at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia, at Adana in Turkey, at Habbaniyah in Iraq, and in Cyprus as well as the proximity of the aircraft carriers of the US sixth fleet in the area within striking distance of Russia. Strategic influence and access to ports for military reasons is just as important to Western capitalism as access to oil.

Nevertheless Dr Petros Sekens of the University of Portsmouth said:

We found clear evidence that countries with potential for oil production are more likely to be targeted by foreign intervention if civil war erupts

He went on to say:

Military intervention is expensive and risky. No country joins another country’s civil war without balancing the cost against their own strategic interests and what possible benefits there are.

In a press release to launch their findings two conclusions of their paper were summarised:

- * The more oil a country has, the more likely a third party will intervene in their civil war
- * The more oil a country imports, the greater the likelihood it will intervene in an oil-producing country’s civil war (<http://text.www2.warwick.ac.uk/news/pressrelease>) Yet government pretend they intervene for moral purposes rather than naked self-interest. They write off opponents as “*conspiracy theorists*” for actually telling the truth about capitalism and the motives of nation states. What does that make the politicians?

Another of the authors, Dr. Vincenzo Bove remarked:

...before the ISIS forces approached the oil-rich Kurdish North of Iraq, ISIS was barely mentioned in the news. But once ISIS got near oil fields, the siege of Kabani in Syria became a headline and the US sent drones to strike ISIS targets

This is not what is found in the media or from politicians like Obama and Cameron. They tell us that the conflicts against ISIS is one between “*Good and evil*” yet see nothing inconsistent in prostrating themselves to the House of Saud and the terrorist regime in Saudi Arabia in order to secure multi-billion arm sales. Nevertheless, both politicians are not averse to the use of state terror as they order the use of jet fighters and drones to rain down death and destruction on the enemy below. No one knows how many civilians in Afghanistan and along the Pakistan have been killed by rockets fired from jets or drones. No one appears to care.

So do the academics give a solution to global conflict? How do they think military force under capitalism can be resolved? They don’t. There is complete silence. This is not the case with socialists. We not only understand

capitalism and what causes capitalism's wars but we also offer a solution: socialism.

The world's resources need to be held in common under democratic control. There needs to be a world without artificial national boundaries, politicians, trade, an exploited working class and the private ownership of the means of production and distribution. Until the working class consciously and politically organise to replace world capitalism with world socialism, conflict and war will continue from one decade to the next just as it did in the 20th century.

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Socialist Ideas and Understanding

For some unexplained reason we are constantly being told that capitalism is so different from previous societies that it is not subject to the law of social evolution which governed the development and decay of previous societies.

The point is, can capitalism make history stand still and do its bidding? Can the profit system, in effect, ensure that it will continue to exist simply by the power of private property ownership and accumulation of capital which most people worship but very few enjoy? Presumably, if capitalism can make its own historical rules there can be no prospect of its abolition.

Looking at the evidence around us, the working class shows no sign of challenging capitalism's rule. There is plenty of social discontent, but this is largely concerned with social reforms or Trade Union issues and cannot be regarded as revolutionary activity.

What are we left with? First, we have a solidly entrenched social system whose defenders have millions to spend on their lies; second, an apparently uninterested working class who persistently whinge at their predicament but periodically vote into power capitalist political parties; and third, a relatively small but principled revolutionary socialist party with limited funds whose monthly visitors to its web site is about 0.0017% of the world's population.

Little wonder we are dismissed as dreamers, utopian preachers and sectarian cranks by our opponents. Yet we persist. An organization which takes on the task of making workers socialists in the face of tremendous difficulties is considered to be either unrealistic or motivated by spiritual rather than material influences. We are neither.

We do not accept the permanence of capitalism any more than we accept the fact that workers' ideas of society cannot be changed. History shows that social systems change, and that these changes are accomplished by thinking people and that men and women's ideas change with them.

This includes ideas on all subjects – religion, politics, morality, science, law and art. Ideas have changed considerably over the centuries and dramatically in the last 100 years. The spread of opinion or social consciousness, as with people's social life generally, develops in accordance with the development of their productive forces. Today, the artificial organs of men and women, their greater control over nature, play a decisive role in their social existence. These artificial organs are not individual but social in character.

If social men and women's intellect, their opinions and culture, are dominated by the circumstances of their economic conditions, at what point can we expect a change in their ideas which will result in a political decision to establish socialism?

The body of opinion today, or the prevailing ideology, is overwhelmingly capitalist, because capitalist ideas are socially sponsored, propagated and broadcast at all levels. Socialist ideas, which arise from the same economic conditions, are ignored or misrepresented as State capitalist or distorted in other ways. Yet the battle of ideas can be fought against such overwhelming odds. In the first instance, we are not merely dealing with people's opinions but with the social factors which give rise to those opinions.

The old French materialists were nearly right when they said opinion governs the world. For example, the political

domination by the Catholic Church as in Feudal society is no longer feasible or tolerated, yet the Catholic Church was the political centre of Feudalism for over a thousand years. Further back in earlier society it was moral to have incestuous sexual relationships, group marriages, infanticide and cannibalism. These were the product of well-defined social conditions. The absence of these practices today has nothing to do with moral enlightenment or higher idealistic standards, but to the changed social conditions. Capitalism produces its own sophisticated form of barbaric cruelty and inhumanity on a far greater scale than these seemingly outrageous practices of yesteryear.

Idealists, and this includes proponents of all religion, moralists, humanists and so on, constantly refer to the innate goodness of men and women and what the world ought to be – the world of the true and the just. This conception of the world as it ought to be bears no relation or connection with the world as it is, but also with the historical development which has occurred.

The idealist's conception of history, which claims people's development to be purely intellectual, based on some timeless ethical cause, is the happy hunting ground for the ostensibly reasonable apologists of capitalism – reason will solve everything they claim. Pure reason, like abstract truth, does not exist. Every thought process must be related to social men and women's material needs. This is what society is all about, the organization of a system of production to meet people's material needs.

The question which obviously arises is does capitalism satisfy or can it be made to satisfy men and women's needs? The answer is obviously – no. The contradictions within the system of poverty in the midst of plenty, its dependence on the deliberate scarcity caused by the market economy, its unpredictability and general anarchy, disqualify it as a social system rendering social service in the real sense of the term.

The capitalists' monopoly of propaganda undoubtedly influences the millions of workers who give their support to it generally. But the performance never matches the promise. You cannot indefinitely persuade people that the temperature at the North Pole is 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

The greatest ally of the socialist is the temperature of the economic conditions. We apply our materialism, our factual analysis, continually to the economic background. Socialist propaganda is not aimed at people's "*innate goodness*" or "*social justice*" but at people's material needs. It will be this factor alone which seen as a practical and reasonable alternative to the anarchy of capitalist production will create revolutionary class consciousness and the subsequent political action based on that consciousness.

Opponents of socialism can be divided into two main groups. One, the dedicated supporters of capitalism and the other, the false friends of socialism; the Labour Party, The Socialist Party, the SWP, the supporters of State Capitalism and so on. Of the two groups, the latter are the most pernicious, confusing what Socialism means and offering unattainable social reforms instead of creating class conscious workers.

The capitalist left attack our socialist case on the ground that workers want "*something now*" – not socialism. The Labour Party believe the preposterous proposition that capitalism can be reformed to be equitable and fair. Socialism, if the word is used at all by the Labour Party is a "*philosophy*" not a social system.

For the Socialist Party and the SWP "*socialism*" is nothing more than State capitalism. Their politics is anything to get the workers angry; to demonstrate, march and riot. They are obsessed with gesture politics like the recent re-enactment of the 1932 Jarrow March which was ill-attended and an abject failure. They chant out "*the Right to Work*" but no capitalist is obliged to employ the working class and least likely to do so in an economic depression. And they oppose "war" but everywhere embrace violent rebellions and nationalist struggles by aspiring capitalists in developing countries of the world.

Most of our critics who tell the Socialist Party of Great Britain the workers cannot understand socialism do not understand it themselves. Socialism cannot be established without working class understanding and this we accept as a core socialist principle.

There is no alternative other than to work to achieve mass socialist understanding. Workers are not fools. If a proposition is presented to them in a reasonable way they will consider it. At the moment information about

socialism is hard to find in most working class circles because of the present size and influence of the Socialist Party of Great Britain and socialists around the world.

There is a vast difference in having a sound and valid scientific case against capitalism and being able to propagate socialist ideas and for these ideas to be heard. This is the real reason why workers currently do not understand socialism. The lack of socialists is purely a technical problem of communication and not, as our critics would claim a flaw in our case.

The responsibility for the extension of socialist propaganda is the working class at large. The speed in acceptance of socialist ideas by the working class depends on that. There are no innate principles in people's existence. Human beings with all their views and feelings, is what nature and society has made them. The establishment of socialism is a task well within the capacity of the modern working class. The alternative is to watch civilization degenerate and deteriorate under an obsolete social system.

(This article is based from papers of the late Comrade Jim D'Arcy).

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Marxism and Democracy

It is not possible to explain in an understandable way what the attitude of the Socialist Party of Great Britain is to Marxism and democracy without first dismissing the mass of representation and half-truths surrounding the term Marxism, and distinguishing between widely differing concepts of democracy.

For socialists, Marxism means essentially the mature, stated views of Marx and Engels on the materialist conception of history, the economic analysis of capitalism and the way in which the working class must use the "*parliamentary system*" to achieve political power as the necessary preliminary to the establishment of socialism. This is the legitimate way in which the term should be used but it is not the way in which it is commonly used by the media or by numerous organisations all over the world that have chosen to label themselves Marxist.

Leading politicians and commentators habitually use Marxism as a term of abuse to blacken the Labour party; like the description of that Party as "*Marxist*". Neither in that Party's aim, nor in its economics, nor in its political propaganda can this usage be justified. Tackled about this, well-known columnists have taken refuge in a defence that amounts to no more than that "*nowadays everybody does it*", a complete abdication from their proclaimed role of providing genuine information to their readers.

As regards the organisations that style themselves Marxist, some do this in total ignorance of the writings of Marx and Engels while others make use of the statements made before a lifetime of experience had brought maturity.

There is as much confusion about democracy as about Marxism. Hardly any political organisation now admits to being antidemocratic; the BNP pays lip-service to democracy as does the Chinese dictatorship; only some theocratic Islamic states and the present Isis caliphate straddling the Syrian and Iraqi border repudiate the democratic process.

The autocratic and anti-socialist political structure within Chinese capitalism is also claimed to be "*democratic*" even though it takes place within the framework set out by the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party and its leadership. At various national, municipal and local levels candidates are voted into power, however the Communist Party agrees to the names of the candidates who are standing in elections and no other political party can contest elections because the Communist Party is enshrined within the Chinese constitution to the exclusion of any competitors.

The working class in China cannot vote for a socialist political party with the aim of establishing the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society; socialist candidates cannot freely stand for elections; and the dissemination of socialist ideas are prohibited on pain of arrest, torture and

imprisonment.

The recent political demonstrations in Hong Kong arose because of the Chinese Communist Party's insistence to have control over the political nomination of candidates, thereby denying one person one vote. Matters are made worse through censorship of information by the government and its use of state violence against political dissent. Under such unfavourable political circumstances socialists have to take political action the best they can while ensuring complete independence from other political organisations protesting against the government as “*democratic reform movements*”.

All of this is far removed from the concept of democracy in socialist society. In socialism, objective information will be freely and fully available – no vested interests to give slanted versions. All will be able to hear and discuss different policy proposals. Decisions will be by majority vote; and will be accepted and accepted by the minority, unless and until they can persuade the majority to change its views. Above all, because there will be no coercive state and all members of society will have free access to the means of life there can be no question of the minority being penalised in any way.

What about democracy in “*parliamentary*” countries like Great Britain? Objective information is not fully and freely available here but under normal conditions a socialist political party can operate legally and can answer capitalist propaganda. It can state that the socialist case and contest elections, and as the overwhelming majority of electors are working class it is open to the workers, through Parliament, to gain control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces, for the purpose of establishing socialism when they so decide.

Marx and Engels have always appreciated the value of the vote. In 1848, in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO they wrote:

We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy

Looking back, half a century later, Frederick Engels said:

The Communist Manifesto had already proclaimed the struggle for the general franchise, for democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat... (Introduction to Class Struggle in France, 1895)

Only four years after the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO Marx emphasised the point in an article in the NEW YORK TRIBUNE (25 August 1852):

The carrying of universal suffrage in England would...be a far more socialistic measure than anything which has been honoured with that name on the Continent. Its inevitable result, here, is the political supremacy of the working class.

In their early years of political activity Marx and Engels had been optimistic about the speed with which developments would take place. With greater experience they had to recognise that the obstacles – the resourcefulness of the ruling class, the adaptability of capitalism, and the slowness with which socialist ideas were accepted by the workers – were much greater than they had supposed.

Engels, in the work already mentioned summarised this:

The time is past for revolutions carried through by small minorities at the head of unconscious masses. When it gets to be a matter of the complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must participate, must understand what is at stake and why they are to act. That much of history of the last fifty years has taught us. But so that the masses may understand what is to be done, long and persistent work is required...Even in France the Socialists realise more and more that no durable success is possible unless they win over in advance the great mass of people, which in this case means the peasants. The slow work of propaganda and parliamentary activity are here also recognised as the next task of the party.

Engels, however, still underestimated the difficulties of the situation, this time through his misjudgement of the quality of membership of the social democratic parties. They were more and more being recruited not for the socialist objective, but by the attraction of the “immediate demands” attached to the social democratic programmes. They were still dependent on “leadership” and it remained for the Socialist party of Great Britain to show that the whole leadership idea is alien to democracy and the socialist movement.

PROFIT IS A DIRTY WORD

The phrase “*Profit is a dirty word*” appears to have come out of the building of municipal baths at the turn of the 20th century. The ruling class were alarmed at the disease, dirt and filth associated with the working class living in the city slums. Baths were built to minimize disease and prevent it spreading to the wealthy areas of the City.

The companies which made vast profits building the municipal baths were seen as making profit out of the misery of the working class. The phrase has now come into general use much to the annoyance of the capitalist class and its defenders who have spent a great deal of time trying to obliterate the phrase from the internet.

Profit is a “*dirty*” word for the very real reason of being associated with class exploitation. And a fundamental characteristic of the working class is that the working class is exploited. And exploitation for socialists has a very precise meaning. It does not mean low pay, poor working conditions or a ruthless boss. It simply means that the working class receives in wages less than the value they produce.

The workers sell their labour power to a capitalist who uses it with the means of production to produce commodities for sale with a view to profit. In the productive process the working class produces more value than their wages and salaries. This surplus labour time or, as Marx put it, surplus value is the source of the capitalist’s profit. As we have already pointed out capitalism is based on the private ownership of the means of production.

The reason why the capitalist class can exploit the working class is because of this ownership protected by the machinery of government through the capitalist’s political agents in Parliament. The intensity and extent of exploitation is why the class struggle takes place. Class conflict is not an invention of Marx or socialists.

Capitalists have to produce cheaper than their competitors or go under and this means getting higher and higher productivity out of the work force; what Marx called extending surplus labour time against necessary labour time.

As Marx noted, the class struggle is in fact a political struggle. To abolish the wages system and to end class privilege requires conscious and political action of the working class to replace capitalism with socialism.

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Philip Webb: Architecture and Socialism

Philip Webb and William Morris

Forget, The Magna Carta, the Battles of Agincourt and Waterloo and other ruling class celebrations; 2015 marks the anniversary of the death of Philip Webb, primarily known for the Red House he designed for William Morris at Bexley Heath, London in 1859 but lesser known as a member of The Socialist League and the Hammersmith Socialist Society.

W R Lethaby, in his biography of Philip Webb described him as “*so great a man that no one has heard of him*” (*Philip Webb and his Work*). This was in 1935 and although it no longer remains the case in the field of architecture, Webb is still largely unknown in socialist circles because he has remained so long in the shadow of his friend and colleague William Morris.

Webb joined the Democratic Federation (soon to become Social Democratic Federation) with Morris in 1883, and

then helped form the Socialist League in 1884 becoming Treasurer. He then became a member of the Hammersmith Socialist Society in January 1891, which had been established a year earlier in 1890 following a split within the Socialist League.

Webb's attraction to socialism was dismissed as peripheral and unimportant by E.P. Thompson in *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1859) and by Florence Saunders Boos in *William Morris's Socialist Diary* (History Workshop, Issue 13 Spring 1982) but recent scholars have shown that he was neither just a loyal and passive follower of Morris nor someone "*whose politics may have been rather simplistic...*" (Boos loc cit note 87). The architectural historian Mark Swenarton noted that:

From February 1886 onwards virtually all Webb's leisure time was given over to the League, as his life assumed the pattern of the political activist. Monday evenings were spent at the League Council, Thursday evenings were spent at the Ways and Means Committee and Saturdays at the League offices working in the books with the secretary. In addition there were weekly meetings of the branch and monthly meeting of London members, which Webb took his turn at chairing, and lecture to other branches: in June 1886 he lectured to the Clerkenwell and Hoxton branches on "The Necessity for Socialism" and in September to the Bloomsbury branch on "Foreigners and English Socialism". In November he attended a meeting of the Oxford branch (run by Charles Faulkner) which prompted some reflections on present and future society, published in Commonweal the following month (Artisans and Architects, p. 50 1989)

Morris stated that Webb was "*the man who taught me socialism*" (Morris quoted by W R Lethaby loc cit p.241 1979). His adult working life was based on creative work and social comradeship embracing the principle "*to be*" rather than "*to have*". It was Webb who introduced Morris to the condition of the working class in Middlesbrough and Wolverhampton through his own practice as an architect while Webb was also an anti-imperialist and opposed war long before Morris (Sheila Kirk, *Philip Webb: Pioneer of Arts and Crafts Architecture* p.204). Webb gave as much money as he could to the Social Democratic Federation and to the Socialist League even though it was to leave him living a life of poverty in retirement. Webb also gave talks and lectures and was on the Committee of the Socialist League. He played no greater or lesser role than any other person in the organisation.

In a socialist party where there are no leaders and there are no followers there is, of course, those who have different talents; some write articles, others make excellent propagandists but most just carry on indispensable party work as treasurers, general secretaries, committee members, literature sellers and so on. A socialist party is not a party of personalities and theorists; the love of academics and biographers. A socialist party is not a collection of individuals but members of the working class formed by capitalism and the class struggle around a common political interest and socialist objective. There were workers from various backgrounds in the Socialist League but what mattered for the members was the making of socialists and the building up of a socialist organisation.

From Ruskin to Marx

Webb's initial disgust at the social and artistic cost of commerce, competition and "*the bottom line*" was an aesthetic and moral criticism associated with Pugin and Ruskin. Pugin and Ruskin disliked the way in which commodity production forced craftsmen to become mere appendages to machines rather than to take pleasure in their work and have control over what is produced and for whom. The Gothic past became the model for a critique against commercially driven machine production.

In 1836, Pugin published *Contrasts*, a polemical book which argued for the revival of the medieval Gothic style, and also "*a return to the faith and the social structures of the Middle Ages*" The book contrasted a utopian medievalism of craftsmanship and social cohesion with the brutal and fragmented utilitarian commercialism of early capitalism. In a series of influential illustrations Pugin contrasted a pre-reformation architecture with the buildings and towns of a developing capitalism. A romanticised feudal monastery where monks are shown living a life of comradeship and tendering to the sick is juxtaposed with a panoptican workhouse where the poor are depicted being beaten, half-starved and sent off after death for dissection.

Another non-socialist critique of early capitalism was John Ruskin, the author of the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*

(1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3). For Ruskin the ideal model was the Gothic architecture of the Cathedral and the social conditions under which such architecture was constructed. The Guild system of the cathedral builders were seen as preferable to the division of labour of mid-19th century capitalism.

Ruskin, in his romantic criticism of capitalism wrote:

We have much studied and much perfected, of late, the great civilised invention of the division of labour; only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men: - divided into mere segments of men – broken into small fragments and crumbs of life...And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this, - that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages (The Stones of Venice, 1853 vol. II, in Ruskin Works 10, pp. 193-4 loc cit pp 27-29).

Compare this comment with the one by Marx on the division of labour in a capitalist factory:

...when analysing the production of relative surplus value, that within the capitalist system all methods of raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the juggernaut of capital (ch. 25 The General Law of Capital Accumulation p. 799 Capital vol. I Penguin 1996)

Ruskin wanted to encourage “*enlightened*” consumers who were willing to pay more for commodities produced by craftsmen as well as the breaking down of the division of labour into “*thinkers*” and “*labourers*”. It was not only utopian but showed no understanding of the profit imperative driving capitalism; “*naked self-interest*” and “*cash-payment*” as Marx and Engels were to remark in the first section of the *Communist Manifesto* (*The Communist Manifesto and the last Hundred Years: Centenary Edition* Socialist Party of Great Britain 1948 p. 62).

Capitalism, for Marx, with its division of labour and competition had destroyed the guilds and the individual craftsman. The issue was the social relations as a whole not just the effect of capitalism on individual workers which reformers mistakenly believed could be resolved either by social reforms or changes to the conditions of the working class within capitalism. For Marx the problem was the commodity itself not whether a commodity was made by craftsmen working under conditions of simple production or alienated workers in a capitalist factory under condition of extended production where labour power had become a commodity to be bought and sold for a wage.

As Marx put it:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists...simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the product of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart and from outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities...It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things (Capital Vol. 1, The Commodity, Section 4, The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof, p. 165 Penguin 1996).

There was no going back. If the working class was to become free to develop creatively it could only do so by setting itself free consciously and politically from the chains of capital; the exploitation of the wages system and the private ownership of the means of production and distribution. Only then would “*the different forms of labour-power*” be expended “*in full self-awareness as one single social labour force*” (loc cit p. 171). Production in a socialist society would be social; there would be an “*association of free men, working with the means of production in common*” and

the proper proportion between the different types of creative work to be done and the various needs to be met maintained through a conscious and democratic social plan.

Although, William Morris and Phillip Webb were initially influenced by Ruskin, this influence fundamentally changed when they came across the works of Marx in the early 1880's; the alienation of labour within the factory and industrial production of commodities as a place of exploitation from which to extract surplus value. Morris, for example, was not opposed to the use of machinery only to the use of machinery under capitalism.

I do not (believe we should aim at abolishing all machinery; I would do some things with machinery which are now done by hand, and other things by hand which are now done by machinery; in short, we would be the masters of our machines and not their slaves, as we are now. It is not this or that...machine which we want to get rid of, but the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny which oppresses the lives of all of us (ART AND ITS PRODUCERS, 1881).

What of the building industry in which Webb worked? Robert Tressell's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) gave a fictional but largely accurate snap shot of the conditions under which construction workers worked at the turn of the twentieth century. The commercial building industry with its division of labour, use of technology to de-skill and cheapen labour and its profit driven imperative was a far cry from the Arts and Crafts workshops set up by C. R. Ashbee at Chipping Camden in the Cotswolds producing largely luxury commodities for the rich. It was not to last. The Jewellers and silversmiths could not compete with the semi-machine-made methods of other firms in London and Birmingham who produced almost identical goods cheaper. The guild went bankrupt in 1907 (Fiona MacCarthy, *Anarchy and beauty: William Morris and his Legacy*, 2014 p.137).

Webb himself could only make a living by designing buildings for his wealthy and privileged friends. The steam trains taking Webb to his country-house commissions in Yorkshire and Sussex passed by the drab and utilitarian reality of what the rest of society had to pass for as "*homes*". For creativity to exist in the lives of all men and women as a human and social need, capitalism first has to be replaced with socialism.

Webb and the Socialist League

What would Webb be signing up to when joining the Socialist League? It would have been an organization informed by Marx's political concept of the class struggle and his theory of surplus value something conveniently ignored by both Swenarton and Kirk. There has been a concerted effort to play down or ignore the impact of Marx's influence on both Morris and Webb although Morris's own copy of *Capital*, in French, had to be rebound through overuse. Webb gave at least one lecture, entitled the *Source of Capital* to the Horton branch of the Social Democratic Federation in 1883 which would have meant an acquaintance with and understanding of the works of Marx (loc cit p.205).

And the Socialist League was heavily influenced by Marx's three interrelated theories: the materialist conception of history, a labour theory of value and the political concept of the class struggle. The MANIFESTO of the Socialist League explicitly states:

As the civilised world is at present constituted, there are two classes of Society - the one possessing wealth and the instruments of its production, the other producing wealth by means of those instruments but only by the leave and for the use of the possessing classes.

and

We have spoken of unpaid labour: it is necessary to explain what that means. The sole possession of the producing class is the power of labour inherent in their bodies; but since, as we have already said, the richer classes possess all the instruments of labour, that is, the land, capital, and machinery, the producers or workers are forced to sell their sole possession, the power of labour, on such terms as the possessing class will grant them. These terms are, that after they have produced enough to keep them in working order, and enable them to beget children to take their places when they are worn out, the surplus of their products shall belong to the possessors of property, which

bargain is based on the fact that every man working in a civilised community can produce more than he needs for his own sustenance.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1885/manifst1.htm>

The Socialist League had many deficiencies and contradictions, particularly around the question of the vote and the revolutionary use of Parliament by a socialist majority in order to secure the machinery of government including the armed forces. These issues were not to be resolved until the establishment of the Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1904. The Socialist Party of Great Britain also had no need for the services of “*the enlightened middle class*”; a role Webb had seen for himself and Morris within the Socialist League, nor for a list of “*palliatives*” or social reform proposals (see MANIFESTO OF ENGLISH SOCIALISTS, 1893) of which Morris was a signatory for the Hammersmith Socialist Society). There was and is only the socialist objective; the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

In 1901 Webb commented:

...by the herding of labouring men like herrings in a barrel it has been found out that a class of rich people could be produced whose greed could grasp more “than the dreams of avarice” had forecast. Well, is there any sign in this new-born century that the greed-god is about to be knocked off its pedestal? (W. R. Lethaby loc cit p, 11)

Unfortunately the only sign of optimism “*in the new-born century*” was the establishment of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. The remainder of the century was one day of carnage and destruction after the next; capitalism’s wars killed an average of over a hundred people an hour throughout the 20th century (Jonathan Glover: HUMANITY 2003). Nevertheless, the Socialist League was right to insist that initially the principle task is to “*make socialists*” by “*convincing people that socialism is good for them and is possible*” (*Commonweal*, 6, 238 2 August 1890 p. 246 and 6, 253 15 November 1890 pp. 361-2). And it something Socialists, under very difficult circumstances, are doing today.

Socialism and Architecture

What characterises architecture under capitalism? The writer Richard Dienst believes that architecture in a society where the means of production and distribution are privately owned can be defined an act of “*enclosure*”; an atomised world of visual and physical private and state property. Dienst writes:

... in its “earliest form, “enclosure” produced the topography of capitalist agriculture by throwing people off the land and erasing the commons. At its most basic and brutal stage, enclosure has a long history, legible in hedgerows, property deeds, reciprocal borders and exclusive legal jurisdictions THE BONDS OF DEBT 2011.

Architecture as an act of enclosure is therefore a typology of control, power and coercion; the prison cell, the schoolroom, the assembly line, the head office, the bureaucratic district, the parks, and the houses containing individuals lacking social empowerment; a mass daily movement to create surplus value; the never-ending imperative to expand and reproduce capital from one economic cycle to the next..

Dienst goes on to remark:

...architecture has always provided the best visualisations of this regime of social power, from the Panopticon itself, through the various modernist programs for urban autonomy, self-sufficiency and total planning... (pp 122 - 123).

If the production of architecture under capitalism can be seen as an “enclosure” of power and exclusion then a socialist architecture would be a building of social openness and inclusion within the framework of common ownership and democratic control. It does not matter whether an “*open*” architecture unbounded by private property ownership takes its model from either the Guilds of 14th century England; the one favoured by Morris and Webb, or from the Arts and Craft of Lethaby and the Guild of Handicraft or the machine aesthetic of the Bauhaus; what matters is that, as Webb knew, a socialist architecture has to be formed by human considerations not ones driven by commerce, capital and profit; an architecture of liberation fit for a society of free men and women. Architecture style

is unimportant; what is important are the social needs being met and how buildings are constructed and under what conditions.

What will a socialist architecture be like? We cannot know since the socialism following revolution will not be the same a century later. What we can say is that a socialist architecture would come out the needs and aspirations of a socialist society.

What would a socialist architecture be like? We cannot know since the problems and opportunities facing socialism following revolution will not be the same a century later when the rhythm of social life of truly free men and women has changed society beyond all recognition. What we can say is that a socialist architecture would come out the needs and aspirations of an open and democratic socialist society producing buildings of beauty to rival the architecture of the past. Architecture for everyone rather than for the consumption of a privileged few.

In the early stages of socialism, a socialist society will inherit a building portfolio from capitalism and the urgent need to plan, organise and construct a new architecture reflecting the needs in production, distribution, transport, and housing of a socialist society at the time. Solving the problems of poor housing and lack of shelter would be the main priority but out of solving these problems would develop a socialist aesthetic and the very different way buildings would relate to the environment and the way people wanted to live and work.

The Swiss architect Le Corbusier finished his book “TOWARDS A NEW ARCHITECTURE” with the aphorism “*Architecture or revolution? Revolution can be avoided*”.

However, revolution cannot be avoided. Socialism has to be established if an open and libertory architecture meeting society’s needs is rise within the framework of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

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What We Said and When The Socialist Party Of Great Britain Lecture 22nd February 1987 Nationalisation and Workers Control

What We Said and When

It is clever propoaganda, but the realities of the class struggle between those who own but do not produce, and those who produce but do not own, willnot for long be smoothed over by even the most plausible Labour-Communist orator. The working class, faced with the same old ruthlessness of capitalist employers, of Government Departments and of the boards of the mining and transport undertalings when « nationalisation » takes place, will find that they have no defence except the limited defence provided by their own trade unions (Socialist Standard, October 1945).

The task of socialists has also been made more difficult by the association in many people’s minds of nationalisation with socialism. Nationalised or state capitalis industry is in fact just another way of operating capitalism which leaves unchanged the exploited sand subject position of the workers. In Britain, it is the Labour Party which has maily been responsible for this confusion (Pamphlet, Questions of the day, 1969).

Many workers appear to believe that co-operative societies are a form of socialism., or at least a step towards the establishment of socialism. The co-ops buy and sell at a profit. Otherwise they would very soon cease to exist. This profit is derived from the unpaid portion of the labour of some section of the workers. It is imsatyerial whether these

workers are directly employed in production by the co-ops themselves or by the outside cocerns who produce goods in which the co-op deal. The fact that some of this profit is distributed in the form of the « divi » among working-class consumers and members, blinds the latter to the real position (Socialist Standard, August, 1928).

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A Great Idea for the 21st Century

The INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY (6th August 2006) gave a list of the 50 great ideas for the 21st century. One great idea they failed to mention was socialism; the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

Why is socialism not only a great idea but socially necessary to resolve the very real problems faced by the working class majority throughout the world? The establishment of socialism would mean that production would take place solely and directly to meet social need unhindered by the profit motive and the impediment of private property ownership of the means of production and distribution. There would no longer be poverty, war and social alienation.

Isn't this a great idea for the 21st century: that society as a whole democratically determines what is produced, where and for whom? Of course, the INDEPENDENT, like the rest of the capitalist media is constantly hostile to socialism. However, the INDEPENDENT also does not like capitalism "*red in tooth and claw*". Its journalists are forever writing articles supporting a "*fair capitalism*", a "*responsible capitalism*" and a "*regulated capitalism*" uncritically echoing the politically bankrupt thoughts of Ed Miliband and the Labour Party.

So, it comes as no surprise to find the food critic sometime political commentator, Matthew Norman celebrating the anti-working class politics of the Labour Party and dismissing all talk of "*utopian socialism*" as the "*politics*" of the "*adolescent*" (INDEPENDENT 4th February 2015). Capitalism though can only be capitalism. The use of adjectives to give the impression that the profit system can be anything other than a ruthless, competitive and exploitive social system is only a sleigh of hand, a magician's trick; merely smoke and mirrors.

Marx was confronted with capitalism's apologists, like Mathew Norman, in his own day. He said of them:

They all maintain that competition, monopoly, etc., are, in principle—i.e. regarded as abstract thoughts—the only basis for existence, but leave a great deal to be desired in practice. What they all want is competition without the pernicious consequences of competition. They all want the impossible, i.e. the conditions of bourgeois existence without the necessary consequences of those conditions. They all fail to understand that the bourgeois form of production is an historical and transitory form, just as was the feudal form. This mistake is due to the fact that, to them, bourgeois man is the only possible basis for any society, and that they cannot envisage a state of society in which man will have ceased to be bourgeois (letter to P. V. Annikov 1846).

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The Philosophy of Anarchism

The problems thrown up by present-day society are plain for all to see. What is not so obvious is the way to deal with them. This requires thinking about, and once workers start to seriously think about why society provides drudgery, poverty and insecurity, the socialist alternative will become apparent. It is being content to let others do the thinking that results in failure to achieve anything.

The anarchist, in competition with other reformers claims to have a solution to social problems. They claim these originate from the authoritarian state. The state is the negation of liberty in the eyes of the anarchist. It has to be destroyed before liberty can be established (Bakunin). Socialists are accused of wanting to extend the power of the state which shows how little anarchists understand socialism.

On the surface, the anarchists' concept of a libertarian society has led a number of people to believe that socialism and anarchism have the same objective in mind and differ only in method. This is erroneous. The socialist is a materialist who has grasped the historical significance of changing economic conditions leading to a change in people's ideas, whilst the anarchist is an idealist – that is, someone who constructs the world in his mind without reference to material and historical circumstances. The socialist holds that the agent of social change is the class struggle. The capitalist class destroyed the feudal conditions of property and in turn the working class will put an end to the capitalist conditions of property. This is the issue in the class struggle, and it has to be fought on the political field by political parties.

Social change is not possible without political power being gained by those who desire the change. This is the historical sequence civilised society has gone through and must go through in the future. The emergence of the capitalist class and the working class went hand in hand with social progress in the production of wealth. They are not eternal categories, and represent the development of the institution of private property. The impulse to socialism comes from the necessity for the working class as a whole to realize its interests.

Anarchists do not accept this view. They maintain that political action for control of the state by workers is a waste of time, because Parliament cannot possibly serve as an instrument of social transformation. Instead, they advocate industrial and everyday struggles, though experience has shown that social reform is a waste of time and leads nowhere. In pursuing this line the anarchist movement is identical with the reformers of “*the Left*” with their “*day-to-day struggles*”, and form only another fragment of the multifarious reform movements.

One group, The Anarchist Workers' Association has in fact moved away from the traditional anarchist position and wants to:

...create political consciousness amongst the working class, and seeks to develop and support working-class organization” (Aims and Principles, Anarchist Worker, August 1976).

While the journal of the Anarchist Collective, called *Anarchy 19*, discusses at length the need for organization and states a conflict between liberal individualists who are a political and what is described as the broad anarchist movement linked with the class struggle:

The wider anarchist movement finds itself floundering in a sea of confusion, largely unable to present any coherent alternative to the authoritarian Left, simply because it fails to see the need to politically organize (Anarchy 19).

This is a complete departure from the classic anarchist position which was hostile to the working-class organizations, let alone political organisations. Proudhon opposed trade unionism on the grounds that it interfered with the liberty of the subject. Bakunin, during the sessions of the First International, told workers that political action was a waste of time. He constantly attacked Marx who urged the workers to build up an effective well-knit organization for the prosecution of the class struggle on the political field.

The anarchist view is that a change of ideas in themselves, whatever the historical epoch, is sufficient for the establishment of a libertarian society, the perfect society. Rejecting, as they do the theory of social development, their philosophy is purely abstract. It has no roots in the material world, having separated human beings from their environment. People are a product of their social environment, and their thoughts and aspirations are determined by it. The prevailing ideas under capitalism are the ideas of the ruling class, in favour of the wages system and private property. The workers are not revolutionary at present and it would be impossible for them to be revolutionary without seeking the essential step of dispossessing the capitalists by political machinery. There is no other way. Yet the anarchists persist that it can be done by direct action against the capitalists who also control the armed forces. So far, the only direct action anarchists have taken has been for reforms.

The present activities of anarchists have their origin in the unsound theories of their founders. To him the individual was the only reality. Some years earlier, Ludwig Feuerbach, the German philosopher, had said the love of humanity must not extend beyond humanity. Humanity is the highest being for men and women. Stirner went a stage further. He claimed that the love of humanity was an abstract thing and only existed in the mind of men and women and the

only reality was the individual with their wants, tendencies and will: “*For me there is nothing above myself*”. Religion, conscience, morality, the law and family, were so many fetters forced upon him in the name of the abstraction – humanity. “*Right is might and might is right. If you have not got the former you have not got the latter. Every state is a despotism, even the most dramatic, whether it is the despotism of one or many. I recognise nothing above myself. I feel oppressed by every institution that imposes any duty upon me*” (*The Individual and his Property*, 1845).

This is idealism of the highest order. The whole philosophy is based on an abstraction – the individual. Society is not just a collection of individuals; it is the aggregate of relationships. Production and distribution must be organized; labour must be based on co-operation. To talk about individuals as above and separate from the social organization of wealth production is pure fantasy.

Stirner formed what he called the League of Egotists (one ego could not live on its own). In common with anarchists of the present day, he was opposed to socialism. “*If the socialist says that society gives me what I need, the egotist says I take what I want*” (*The Individual and his Property*). The anarchists claim that common ownership and democratic control of the means of production will lead to the regimentation and oppression of the producers shows their ignorance of human behaviour. Humankind is by nature a co-operative animal with a common interest in making society function to the greatest advantage of all.

Three years after Stirner, Proudhon repeated the same view point. For him there was no such thing as social evolution. The state was a fiction. Everything in history was born of men and women’s ideas. The perfect society was always possible at any stage in history if only men and women had discovered the ideas of anarchism. “*The social constitution is innate in humanity yet it could only be discovered as the result of long experience and for the want of it humanity had to invent the political constitution*” (*Confessions of a Revolutionary*, Proudhon, quoted by Pleckanoff). This is an entirely utopian concept of human nature. Human beings do not have any innate principles – their viewpoint is results of their social experience.

The political superstructure of any given society, or the way in which public affairs are administered, arises from the economic basis of that society and exists to serve that basis. A change in that basis produces a change in the superstructure. The administration of public affairs at present is carried on by the state, which is the instrument of the ruling class, and it is essential as long as private property exists. In a society based on common property, the state could not exist as its function would have disappeared. The state is not the cause of private property but the effect of it. Even if the “*smashing*” of the state as advocated by anarchists were possible, it would not remove the condition of private property. Not that Stirner, Proudhon and Kropotkin were opposed to property – on the contrary.

Michael Bakunin died over a hundred years ago. His collected works were published by Sam Dolgoff (Allen & Unwin, 1972), and he is described as the active founder of world anarchism. The same unrealistic theme runs through his entire work. He advances the theory of collectivism, a vast network of free associations with social autonomy which may or may not federate with each other at every level, with of course the right to secede from any federation. The basis of this association was collective property: “*I am in favour of collective property because I am convinced that so long as property, individually hereditary exists...the realisation of equality, economical and social will be impossible*” (*Anarchism and Socialism*, G. Pleckanoff, p.82, Kerr edition). Bakunin apparently was not opposed to individual property if it was not hereditary.

We are left in the dark as how collective property can be socially administered; there is obviously no system proposed and he was not dealing with social property. How can there be administration when any group can secede at any time? Collective property based on independent autonomous units may have had some place in a small peasant community or petty industry in an earlier stage of civilization with low standards of production but to apply the concept to a modern socially integrated economy is utopian. In any case anarchists are not in favour of democratic control and Bakunin’s views on communism bear this out. “*I detest communism because it is the negation of liberty and I cannot conceive anything human without liberty*” (*Anarchism and Socialism*, p. 81). This theme of absolute liberty and “freedom” of the individual which runs through anarchist literature is pure fiction. The anarchists lose sight of the fact that we have to produce the necessities of society and require a social organisation for this purpose and the only way this organization can run effectively is by the democratic control of the majority, not by small autonomous independent units.

Prince Kropotkin followed Bakunin, and is probably the most widely read of all the anarchists. He contributed an article on anarchism for the 11th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1905. The definition of anarchism which he supplied is given as “*a principle on the theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government*”. The ageless nature of this description is later shown by the reference to anarchism in history. According to Kropotkin, everybody from Socrates to Rabelais and others who objected to state interference was an anarchist. He tells us that the exponent of anarchy in ancient Greece was Zeno, the founder of the Stoic philosophy who lived around 300 BC. He regrets that the writings of Zeno have not reached us. “*However, the fact that his wording is similar to the wording now in use shows how deeply he has laid the tendency of human nature of which he was the mouthpiece*” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

This defies balanced comment, but it does demonstrate an unsound, almost spiritual approach. We can leave it for modern anarchists to explain the relevance of Zeno to the social problems of today. Kropotkin supported Proudhon’s mutualist rubbish published in the *Philosophy of Poverty* which Marx dealt with in *The Poverty of Philosophy*: for example, rendering capital incapable of earning interest by means of a National Bank. All anarchists have to do is drop the industrial capitalist from earning a profit on his capital and the landlord and the banker to stop charging rent and interest, and this without expropriation. They do not propose to take political action to dispossess the capitalists. Industrial capitalists will not function without profit and the workers support the wages system. The proposition is idealism gone mad. Little wonder that the capitalists have never taken the theories of anarchism seriously. How could this ethereal rubbish threaten their existence?

The shallowness of Kropotkin was exposed in the Great War of 1914-18 when he supported the Allied cause. When the testing time came, the woolly-headed Kropotkin, in company with other figures of the international Left, was completely impotent. Not understanding the economics of capitalism they were unable to offer any clear advice to the working class who in their millions were going forward to the slaughter. The liberty of the individual met its nemesis in mass conscription.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that the political weapon is the only one which a conscious working class can use to establish socialism. It is not possible for society to develop in any other way. If socialism cannot be established capitalism will continue; there is not a third choice called collective anarchism, communist anarchism, syndicalism, worker’s control or worker’s states. The means of production and distribution are held by the capitalists of the world. It is of the utmost urgency that society as a whole must make them common property of society. The control of the state machine ensures ownership by the capitalist class, so that the first and only task before a revolutionary working class is to gain control of that machine for socialism. The worker can do this by voting, but it is not just the cross on the ballot paper which makes the revolution. It is the man or woman behind the vote. The theories of anarchism rest on the idea that a small intellectual elite can sway society; they have a contempt for the ability of the worker to understand the economics and politics of capitalism and consequently gain socialist knowledge. They preach the gospel of despair, disguised though it may be in the romantic jargon of two centuries ago.

The old utopians like St. Simon gave some stimulus and incentive to the development of the theories of scientific socialism, then in its infancy. The present-day anarchist is reactionary because they advocate the abandonment of the only effective weapon which social evolution has made possible – the political weapon – and politics means parliament. The whole idea of anarchism is based thoroughly in capitalist ideology, with its nebulous ‘freedom’, ‘rights’ and ‘individuals’ and arose at the same time.

This article was based, with some slight alterations, on a paper written by the late comrade Jim D’Arcy which formed part of a lecture he gave and was subsequently published in The Socialist Standard (October 1976 pp 196 - 200). Comrade D’Arcy was expelled with other sound and principled socialists in May 1991 for continuing political action in line with the Object and Declaration of Principles of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

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Syriza and the Troika: A Modern Greek Tragedy

Greek capitalism is back in the news. The Troika, a group of auditors representing the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank, has been enforcing an EU- IMF austerity programme in exchange for loans to the Greek government. This followed the financial problems affecting the Greek economy from 2010 onwards which saw the country on the verge of bankruptcy. Now the Troika looks like it is to be replaced.

The election of Syriza in the January 2015 elections is now set to challenge the terms and conditions of EU-IMF loans. The desperation of so many workers in Greece, four million out of 11 million of whom are at the edge of poverty, led to the rise of populist parties with non-socialist reform policies claiming they would stand up to the EU and German Capitalism. Not only does the election of the new government threaten the attempts to stabilise the Euro and protect the interests of Greece's creditors but it potentially undermines the power the EC and Germany to impose their will on other nation states within the European Union. Of the 227 billion of euros in loans from the Eurozone lenders and IMF, 89 per cent went straight to Greece's creditors, notably in Germany.

When Greece's new Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, an "*unconstructed Marxist*" according to Jeremy Warner of the TELEGRAPH (1st February 2015) gave his victory speech flags were flying high. Supporters of Syriza gathered from across Europe to celebrate an event which they are hoping will change the political landscape of the European Union and beyond. Athens has become a symbol for thousands of so-called left-wing activists, who are coming to Greece to be part of what they hope is the beginning of a revolution. On the Syntagma Square, a group of 200 Italians unfurled a bright red banner "*L'altra Europa con Tsipras*," it read - "*An alternative Europe with Tsipras*." (BBC (January 31st 2015) Mingling among the crowd were dozens of people in purple T-shirts carrying the Podemos logo. Podemos is, politically, the Spanish equivalent to Syriza, and they believe their country could be next for change when they hold general elections later this year. Tens of thousands of their supporters recently took part in a rally in Madrid under the banner "*March for change*". Revolutionary Socialist change, though, will not come about through Podemos anymore than it will come through Syriza. Ironically the anti-EU DAILY TELEGRAPH and its journalists, like Jeremy Warner, actually support Tsipras as a means to end the "*European project*"!

The demonstrators in Spain see the outcome of the Greek elections as a sea change in European politics. For the capitalist left there is the possibility that the political programme and policy of Syriza could be reflected in future political success in Spain, Portugal and Italy. They wish. Unfortunately for the capitalist left it will all end in tears. Greece's new Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras and his government will administer the economy; negotiate the best they can with the Troika or leave the EU and implement economic policies only in the interest of Greek capitalism and the capitalist class not the working class majority. If there is social unrest the government will use force and state violence just as previous governments did.

Under capitalism the working class might create all the social wealth but they are an exploited class cut off from the means of production and distribution. These are owned privately by the capitalist class which all governments must serve; that is, protect their property and deal with foreign capitalists and their governments the best they can. Of course there is brinkmanship. Already the Greek government is apparently making overtures to Russia; perhaps the use of the Souda naval port current used by NATO for the Russian navy which would not go down well with Brussels. But this politics has nothing to do with the working class. Workers have no interest in the EU any more than they have with Greek capitalism. Workers, as Marx noted in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO "*have no country*".

And increasingly the ruling government in Greece will come into conflict with trade unions and the working class generally. Under capitalism it can be no other way. Syriza is not a socialist party nor is it's analysis of capitalism a Marxist one. It's radicalism is bogus and its popularism will soon become unpopular leading to resentment cynicism and anger from the working class once the Party can no longer blame the EU, corruption and the policies of previous government for Greece's austerity and the abject poverty and unemployment millions of Greeks are currently living under. More importantly the Syriza Party were voted into power by a non-socialist working class whose allegiance could swing either to the fascists or support for military intervention. The result is not socialism but a political atmosphere similar to Chile in 1973. And Syriza are opportunists. Syriza has chosen as its coalition partner a group called Independent Greeks. They're a centre-right anti-immigration party whose only common ground with Syriza is their shared opposition to the policies of austerity. On pretty much everything else they disagree and eventually that disagreement will come to the surface in a split and perhaps new elections which might bring back the old regime.

Without any evidence, we are told by the journalist, Gabriel Gatehouse, that the Syriza Party are supported by “*Middle-class Marxists*” (*The middle-class voters who can't resist Karl Marx*, BBC NEWS 31st January 2015). Gabriel Gatehouse believes a revolution is taking place in Greece; a shift in politics and political allegiance throughout society away from the dominant free trade, free market economic liberalism of Germany and the other EU countries:

Where were the firebrands? Where the militant Marxists? Why were these polite, middle-class professionals waiting for Alexis Tsipras to sweep onto the stage and usher in the first ever radical leftist government in the European Union?... They were what would, in any prosperous nation, constitute the political middle ground.

However, the term “*middle-class*” is a fictional concept much like “*the political middle ground*”; there are only two classes in capitalism, a minority exploiting capitalist class and a majority exploited working class. And what does the “*Marxism*” amount to. We are not told. It certainly is not in creating a socialist majority necessary for a socialist revolution and no flags could be seen in Syntagma square with the words “*abolish the wages system*”. Where, indeed, are the “*Militant Marxists*”?

The ancient Greeks invented tragic theatre. One of the mythical figures was Cassandra, a woman with the ability to see the future but no one is prepared to listen – a character from the Oresteia trilogy by Aeschylus. As socialists we identify with Cassandra’s frustration; our advice to the working class of not voting for capitalist politicians is ignored despite the economic and social consequences. Capitalist governments cannot run the profit system in the interest of all society and the workers will always be disappointed and let down. As the capitalist Left from all over Europe joined in the celebrations the demonstrators played Patti Smith's anthem “*People Have the Power*” over the loudspeakers. *It should have been the Who's “Won't be fooled again”* where the song ends with the warning: “*Meet the new boss: Same as the old boss*”.

The tragedy is that the working class in Greece, like the working class elsewhere in the world, has the potential for becoming a conscious and political force for revolutionary change but they presently vote into power capitalist political parties like Syriza. Democracy also began in Greece; however, just as Greek tragedy leads to death and destruction so democracy is a double-edged knife to be used either to cut the ties of capital or to be used to slit your own throat.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those

who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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